

Alexander Hamilton Speech in the New York Convention, 25 June 1788

There are two objects in forming systems of government—Safety for the people, and energy in the administration. When these objects are united, the certain tendency of the system will be to the public welfare. If the latter object be neglected, the people's security will be as certainly sacrificed, as by disregarding the former. Good constitutions are formed upon a comparison of the liberty of the individual with the strength of government: If the tone of either be too high, the other will be weakened too much. It is the happiest possible mode of conciliating these objects, to institute one branch peculiarly endowed with sensibility, another with knowledge and firmness. Through the opposition and mutual controul of these bodies, the government will reach, in its regular operations, the perfect balance between liberty and power. The arguments of the gentlemen chiefly apply to the former branch—the house of representatives. If they will calmly consider the different nature of the two branches, they will see that the reasoning which justly applies to the representative house, will go to destroy the essential qualities of the senate. If the former is calculated perfectly upon the principles of caution, why should you impose the same principle upon the latter, which is designed for a different operation? Gentlemen, while they discover a laudable anxiety for the safety of the people, do not attend to the important distinction I have drawn. We have it constantly held up to us, that as it is our chief duty to guard against tyranny, it is our policy to form all the branches of government for this purpose. Sir, it is a truth sufficiently illustrated by experience, that when the people act by their representatives, they are commonly irresistible. The gentleman [Melancton Smith] admits the position, that stability is essential to the government, and yet enforces principles, which if true, ought to banish stability from the system. The gentleman observes that there is a fallacy in my reasoning, and informs us that the legislatures of the states—not the people, are to appoint the senators. Does he reflect, that they are the immediate agents of the people; that they are so constituted, as to feel all their prejudices and passions, and to be governed, in a great degree, by their misapprehensions? Experience must have taught him the truth of this. Look through their history. What factions have arisen from the most trifling causes? What intrigues have been practised for the most illiberal purposes? Is not the state of Rhode-Island, at this moment, struggling under difficulties and distresses, for having been led blindly by the spirit of the multitude? What is her legislature but the picture of a mob? In this state we have a senate, possessed of the proper qualities of a permanent body: Virginia, Maryland, and a few other states, are in the same situation: The rest are either governed by a single democratic assembly, or have a senate constituted entirely upon democratic principles—These have been more or less embroiled in factions, and have generally been the image and echo of the multitude. It is difficult to reason on this point, without touching on certain delicate cords. I could refer you to periods and conjunctures, when the people have been governed by improper passions, and led by factious and designing men. I could shew that the same passions have infected their representatives. Let us beware that we do not make the state legislatures a vehicle, in which the evil humors may be conveyed into

the national system. To prevent this, it is necessary that the senate should be so formed, as in some measure to check the state governments, and preclude the communication of the false impressions which they receive from the people. It has been often repeated, that the legislatures of the states can have only a partial and confined view of national affairs; that they can form no proper estimate of great objects which are not in the sphere of their interests. The observation of the gentleman therefore cannot take off the force of my argument.

Cite as: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume XXII: New York, No. 4